

The Case for the Waterfront Connector

Over the past few weeks there's been a steady stream of articles and opinions about the Edmonds Street Waterfront Connector. Unfortunately, also in the mix there's been a fair amount of misinformation and/or confusion. I feel it's time to speak up again about the rationale for the Waterfront Connector and why I continue to propose this important project for our community's future.

I also wish to point out, contrary to some claims, that I continue to stand by this project for one reason only: my deep and enduring concern for the public safety of our community. As my two terms as your Mayor wind down, I have no further political ambitions that could somehow be served. What's more, the great state of our City, its financial soundness, the major community projects already in place or under way, and our many accomplishments over the past 7-1/2 years already serve as whatever legacy I may have wished to leave.

In short, the Waterfront Connector continues to be of grave importance to me in light of my primary duty as your Mayor: to ensure the safety of our residents, businesses and visitors – whenever and wherever in our community.

As you know, the Waterfront District is a complex community of businesses, residences, community attractions, marine-related activities, events, and the Ferry Terminal. Hundreds of people cross the railroad tracks hourly, thousands daily, and millions yearly. What's more, at any one time there are hundreds of people present in the Waterfront District.

And folks, all of this – residents, workers, visitors, buildings, improvements, boats and equipment – is at risk daily because of the at-grade crossings that can delay emergency-response vehicles at any time simply from passing trains; or worse - when trains stall and block both Main and Dayton, emergency response is entirely cut off for extended periods.

And this is *today's* reality. Imagine the risk in, say, 20 years when instead of 40+ trains a day we see up to 100 trains a day. Instead of 1-2 hours a day of closures from passing trains, we see over 4 hours. Instead of one or two train-related accidents or break-downs, we see several per year. This is what we have to plan

for. It's not about how many incidents we have had to date or even this year. It's about the future. We plan for the future in everything we do, and the Waterfront Connector is precisely that: a project for the future of our City.

At the risk of sounding dramatic, the following scenarios are very real possibilities:

- A kitchen fire in one of our Waterfront restaurants escalates to engulf the entire building as fire trucks cannot respond in time due to passing trains;
- A diver struggling out of the water from the Dive Park suffers an embolism and needs urgent care, yet cannot be attended to in time before he dies;
- A child playing on the beach with her family chokes on a toy and cannot be reached in time

How would we feel in, say, 2030 when any or all of these scenarios have played out, yet we didn't seize the opportunity now to plan for the future and avoid these tragedies? I dare say starting up a similar project then would cost vastly more, would see even less state and federal contributions, and would take longer.

Some folks have suggested that, at roughly \$28 million, the project simply costs too much. That the monies could be put to better use providing sidewalks or paving streets. This is simply not the case. This project will be financed in large part by state and federal monies specifically intended for these types of public works projects. These sources of funds simply DO NOT provide monies for sidewalks or pavement projects.

And speaking of the state and federal level, I should mention that we've received strong support for the Waterfront Connector from both our state and federal elected representatives, with a total now of \$7.05 million allocated by the Legislature for the project, in addition to \$1.5 million from the Port of Edmonds, for a total of \$8.55 million.

What's more, let me put this project's cost in perspective. The suite of improvements we've planned for in the Highway 99 Corridor will likely total over \$150 million. Should we likewise deem those projects too expensive and move to cancel them also?

In the final analysis, folks, it comes down to these four simple points:

- The future safety of hundreds of thousands of residents, workers, motorists and visitors will be substantially secured with the construction of the Edmonds Street Waterfront Connector.
- This project was chosen from among 51 alternatives as the best located, most cost-efficient, and least impactful option that provides the key functions of emergency response, pedestrian and bicycle access, and the potential for ferry off-loading in emergencies.
- Given input from City Councilmembers and the public we have been able to streamline the design, reduce costs, and minimize environmental impacts, as well as enhance the aesthetics of the proposed structure. Councilmembers have echoed public concern over the aesthetics of whatever is ultimately constructed. This input has been taken to heart, and the design team includes architects, and an artist, in addition to the traditional battery of civil engineers, in order to ensure that the structure be graceful and aesthetically pleasing, in addition to serving its functional purposes. What's more, additional opportunities for public and City Councilmember input into the ultimate design will be available as design development progresses, and
- The \$28 million price tag will be funded in large part by state and federal monies.

City staff and I will continue to work to design this project to be the most aesthetically pleasing and least impactful structure possible, while providing vitally necessary public-safety benefits.

I hope you can join me in seeing these benefits, too.